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CIA View Of War in Viet Nam

First Director of Agency
Provided Information,
Not Decisions on Policy

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SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Robert S. McNamara has built a reputation for having a factual answer for every question. He will return to Washington in a few days with some new factual answers on Viet Nam.

He hinted at some of the answers before leaving Wednesday with Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, on his sixth trip to Saigon—probable mobilization of reserves, larger draft calls, extension of enlistments of men on active duty, and additions this year to the military budget.

President Lyndon B. Johnson has already forecast "new and serious decisions" in the war in Viet Nam, including the commitment of substantially more American fighting men. The President said that he would be in a better position to decide how many after McNamara and Lodge have returned.

HOW MANY AMERICAN troops will it take to win the war in Viet Nam?

An official who has watched the war expand in the last four years says: "McNamara's successive answers to that question have been the story of the buildup of American forces in Viet Nam. He said 12,000 would do it, then 16,000, then 24,000 then 40,000, and now it's up to 200,000."

The buildup now has reached 71,000, with the announced strength by the end of this month set at about 83,000. Officials here and in Saigon have been speaking for several weeks of a total of several hundred thousand by the end of the year.

McNamara was asked at his press conference Wednesday what method he used to decide on increases. Had he estimated future needs earlier this year, or did he discover the need for more troops from time to time as news of the fighting came

His answer is worth quoting in full:

"Well, a little bit of both, I think. The situation is changing. And as it changes we must change our plans. At any given time, we assign forces to South Viet Nam in relation to a military plan that has been established and approved by the appropriate constitutional authorities. That plan remains in effect, and we supply forces in accordance with it until the situation changes.

"Changes in the situation are beyond our control. What action the North Viet Nameese will take in accordance with these statements I have just read to you, I cannot predict.

"ALL I CAN SAY is that at any particular time we will have a plan to respond to our best estimate of their actions, and we will modify that plan when we see indications that they are changing their own plans."

McNamara's explanation put changes in the war in terms of changes in enemy plans—increased infiltration from North Viet Nam and more aggressive patterns of attack.

Conversations with many military men on the scene a few months ago indicated that other American estimates are being revised.

There is a growing view that the United States has been underestimating the stamina of the Viet Cong and its ability to command support in the countryside.

On the other side of the equation, the view is growing that too much has been expected of the South Viet Nameese forces—their willingness and ability to fight, to learn and to cultivate the support of the Viet Nameese people.

An American general, returning home after a tour of duty in Viet Nam, ridiculed in private conversation the performance of Viet Nameese troops at all levels in fighting for their country.

In short, there has been a growing belief by American military men that the Viet Nameese are not willing or able to fight their own war effectively and that the United States must do it for them.

In contrast to that view, McNamara has been telling Representatives and Senators that the Viet Nameese can handle the situation with a moderate amount of American help. He has been advising them to wait until the monsoon season is over in October; if the Viet Cong can be held back until then, there ought to be an upturn.

McNAMARA HAS BEEN a strong advocate of bombing selected targets in North Viet Nam in an effort to persuade Hanoi to call off the war in the south.

But he is understood to have resisted pressure to bomb targets in the immediate Hanoi area. It is understood, further, that McNamara pressed hard for a "diplomatic initiative" to accompany the new bombing strategy in discussions that led up to Mr. Johnson's offer of "unconditional discussions." Secretary of State Dean Rusk is

McNamara's position is relatively moderate, in tune with his doctrine of "controlled response." He has been quoted as saying that retaliation for its own sake is irrational, that it should be selective and controlled—"an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a Minsk for a Hartford."

Other high officials have been calling for "an eye for a tooth."

The new director of the Central Intelligence Agency, William F. Raborn Jr., has already become known as one who presses for a massive military response. He is said to have been the first to urge President Johnson to send a big force to the Dominican Republic.

A SOURCE FAMILIAR with recent policy discussions on Viet Nam quotes Raborn as

advocating "a Rotterdam policy decision on what will be the shape of the war."

IT STILL IS a sharply limited operation. The United States will have only 36,500 combat troops in Viet Nam by the end of July, compared to more than 300,000 in Korea at the peak of that war.

Despite Rusk's statement last Sunday that "the idea of sanctuary is dead" in the Viet Nameese war, American bombers still avoid targets in North Viet Nam where Russian or Chinese troops are stationed. House Republican leaders have been urging an end to this restriction.

Senator Robert F. Kennedy (Dem.), New York, called again this week for a return to the counter-insurgency program developed under the late President John F. Kennedy and now all but abandoned. "We cannot win with mere military force—for guns cannot fill empty stomachs, napalm cannot cure the sick, and bombs cannot teach a child to read," he said in a speech last May.

The approaching decisions on the reserves, the drafts, the tours of duty, the budget and the continuing buildup of forces in Viet